



THE STATE  
of **ALASKA**  
GOVERNOR SEAN PARNELL

Alaska Commission on  
Postsecondary Education

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**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Members, Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education  
**FROM:** Diane Barrans, Executive Director  
**DATE:** October 13, 2014  
**SUBJECT:** Executive Director's Report

As it generally tends to do during the fall months, the rate at which time is passing seems to be accelerating towards the year end. Your managers and staff remain highly engaged in a number of ongoing projects as described in the various senior management reports.

You will note that while these projects vary in scope, whether agency wide, state enterprise wide, or involve multi-agency and/or partners, each one is positive in terms of ensuring organizational health and well-being (succession planning, staff development and healthy living initiatives), budget optimization or improved efficiency (HELMS.net, IRIS, and a new grant/scholarship management system), or providing new or better leveraged state resources to aid ACPE and other stakeholders seeking to enable more Alaskans to be part of a highly skilled, resident workforce and contribute to the state economy (ANSWERS, the Network, and a sustainable ACAC program). Management and IT resources continue to work at maximum capacity to keep projects on track while also ensuring routine business tasks are not neglected.

Over the final quarter of 2014 and first part of 2015, I will return my attention to preparation for and engagement with the Alaska Legislature. FY16 budget preparation is underway. With the exception of some additional budget authority for ANSWERS' project management office (PMO) expenses, we expect the Commission budget to be stable. To minimize the size of the PMO increment, we have identified existing budget authority to cover approximately 70% of estimated costs. In addition to advocating for the next fiscal year's budget request, I anticipate relevant committees will be interested in status reports on both the ANSWERS project (and any related legislation) and APS outcomes for this fourth year of the scholarship. These activities will be done collaboratively with our partners at Labor, EED and UA. Across the board leadership concurs that consistency of message as well as transparency around ANSWERS is essential to the SLDS acceptance and longevity.

With respect to the fall meeting materials and agenda items, under the item immediately following this report I have included several news articles which are relevant to issues about which the Commission concerns itself. The first article is an analysis of the

economic benefits to individuals of completing their education program on time. The next two pieces focus on the broad topic of education loan debt. One article takes on the media itself for the apparently skewed representation of the “problem” of education loan debt. The other reporting piece raises the question of whether certain policies of the federal student loan program, which are designed to aid borrowers in gaining relief from or managing their debt, have the unintended consequence of causing students to over borrow in expectation of not having to repay the full amount of their debt. I look forward to hearing any thoughts or perspectives you may have on these topics.

In addition to Management updates at this meeting, Chair Johnsen has asked for a presentation by HCM Strategists Associates describing the recent expansion of a Lumina initiative to advance the foundation’s three-point higher education policy agenda. As you will hear, through the Strategy Labs, Lumina is taking a state-by-state approach to assisting in the development of policies that: 1) improve student outcomes in terms of completion, learning and employment; 2) Align investments with state priorities and student needs; and, 3) Create smarter pathways for students. Lumina leadership is aware that every state has its own unique culture, challenges and priorities and so is making resources available to inform and facilitate work that results in the most effective policies and practices possible for a given state. Given current work that is happening at EED, Labor, UA and ACPE which is designed to positively impact student outcomes, the timing of the Strategy Labs expansion seemed potentially beneficial to our work here in Alaska.

I look forward to seeing you in Anchorage later this month. If you have any questions or comments in advance of the meeting, please feel free to email me at [diane.barrans@alaska.gov](mailto:diane.barrans@alaska.gov) or call my office at 907.465.6740.